

WINNOWNING TIME

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A SERMON
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*“What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.”
Jeremiah 23:28.*

IT is remarkable that God has traced so much of the misery of the children of Israel in the period of their degradation to the unfaithfulness of those governors, priests, and prophets who ruled over them. The crying evil of a nation's crimes lay at the door of these foolish shepherds; at first it would seem that the main stress of calamity rested on the common people, and the time-serving rulers enjoyed ease and affluence as the fruit of their own corruption, but when the Most High arises to Judgment, He begins with those “pastors” who have foully betrayed their sacred trust. As one who has seen their way with His watchful eyes, and heard their lies with His ever-listening ears, He denounces them with terrible threats, while on the other hand, He looks with compassion on the unhappy victims of strange delusion and cruel oppression—and compares them to a flock hard driven and mercilessly scattered. No, more, He claims this people as His own flock, whose wrongs He will avenge, whose rights He will restore, whose fears He will relieve, and whose prosperity He will secure. The sin of those false prophets is exposed in terms which leave them no shadow of excuse; it was a profanity that dared to invoke the divine name for their horrible wickedness; it was a folly that perverted every kind of truth, and it was a mischief that made the land mourn and dried up all its pleasant places. Therefore the anger of the Lord went forth like a whirlwind in its fury, yet like arrows shot from His bow it singled out the head of the wicked and executed vengeance on the real offenders. Here, then, in this chapter, we have some of God's most withering threats, and some of His most gracious promises. The abettors of sin are made a prey, and the victims of sin are delivered. Is not this according to the manner of God?

Whenever God's word deals with truthful things be they material objects or living persons, however weak and feeble they are, it always speaks of them tenderly, and handles them gently. God Himself has an eye of respect for everything that is real and veritable. Notwithstanding a delicacy of texture or an infirmity of constitution, He considers the things that are in their own order with generous condescension; His care is lenient, and His mercy very tender—He does not quench the smoking flax, nor will He break the bruised reed. But God hates every false thing; He scorns the hypocrite and the dissembler. The words of Jehovah are keen and cutting, sometimes even sarcastic as He withers the specious with a laugh of ridicule! There is a sacred bitterness in the tone with which the prophets and the apostles, and far above them, the Lord and Master of apostles and prophets, speak of everything that is false and feigned, hollow and equivocal. You find no sparing in the rod of His hand, nor any gentleness in the rod of His mouth; what words could be more terrible than such denunciations as these—“O generation of vipers, who has warned you to escape from the wrath to come”? “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves”? The Savior cannot endure specious guile, however fair its show. True image of the invisible God, Himself, He hates the cursed trailing serpent. He speaks right, but when beneath that which seems to be honest and of good report, treachery lurks unseen, He conceals not such a holy detestation as becomes One whose eyes are too pure and holy to look upon iniquity, or countenance a fraud.

Let me beg you to notice the peculiar sharpness and biting severity of the text—“What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.” Like the edge of a razor it cuts; as a saber flashing over one's head; a sword gleaming to the very point; a fire lurid with coals of juniper, we are appalled as we glance at it! It strikes

with implacable resentment. There is no word of mercy towards the chaff—not a thought of clemency or forbearance. He blows at it as though it were a worthless thing, not to be accounted of, a nothing that vanishes with a puff; the wheat He gathers and stores up; He houses it in His garner, for there will be many a plowing of the fields, and many a sowing of the seed, and many a harvest-time to follow for the precious grain, but as for the chaff, He has nothing to say of it—He scatters it with the blast—“What is the chaff to the wheat?”

Let this apprehension of the severity of God towards everything that is fictitious, counterfeit, and false, move us to inquire scrupulously into those matters concerning which our truthfulness must be brought into judgment.

I. IN APPLICATION TO ALL MINISTRIES of God’s word, let us, first of all, face the question, “What is the chaff to the wheat?”

It is quite certain that there always have been some faithful ministries—weighty, powerful, full of thought and emotion, ministries ordained of God by which the Spirit of God works, and through which the saints are gathered together, edified, sanctified, and perfected. On the other hand, in all ages of the church’s history there have been ministries which, with much appearance of well-doing, much glitter of oratory, much garnish of eloquence, have yet never been serviceable to the church of God! These ministries may have been of service to the outside world. They have been ministries, indeed, which have preached, “Peace, peace,” where there was no peace; they have been ministries dispensing sedatives and narcotics to men’s consciences; ministries that have not appealed to the hearts, but pandered to the tastes and passions of the hearers. In every age and in every place that the gospel has been proclaimed, some have been found ready to mistake the force of *rhetoric* for the *power* of the Holy Spirit—the persuasive-ness of impassioned speech for the convictions of saving faith. Nor can we doubt, no, we *know* without doubt that it is so—even at this present time there is the ministration of wheat, and the ministration of chaff. If the spiritual man who discerns all things should just traverse the streets of this metropolis—take the round of its religious meeting houses, and begin to examine the ministry in each, he would soon find that there are some which bear the stamp of divine truth and energy, while there are others, alas, which stand only in the wisdom of men—equipped with the learning of the schools, but destitute of the power which comes from above! What comparison, now, can these two vocations bear in the sight of God? He has in His heart a high esteem for that ministry which He has ordained, and for every minister whom He has anointed, but as to the other, He accounts it as a thing of *nothing*—less than nothing and vanity! “What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.” What is it? Of what use is it? What service can it render?

Men follow it with much approbation and applause, and accept it as though it were a service to be thankful for—an institution to be highly prized! But God snuffs it out, and He says, “To what end? Where is the profit? What is the chaff to the wheat?” O that some of us who are called to preach, and some who are called to teach here in different ways, may remember that we, as well as others, are being tried and tested by the Most High God, and that the question which perhaps we are ready enough to apply to our neighbors, is no less suitable to ourselves! God may be saying concerning us, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” if our ministry is also chaff, as well as theirs. Well, it behooves us to take heed, for the day shall declare it; he who has built wood, hay, and stubble shall find his work perish in the fire, and happy shall it be for him if he shall be saved, for it shall be in his case, “so as by fire.”

That ministry which comes from God is distinguished altogether from that which is not of His own sending by its effects; *it is sure to be heart-breaking*. Have you been from your childhood under the ministry of the word, and have you never been made to loathe yourself in the sight of God? Has the sword of the Spirit never pierced you? Have you never felt rebuked, accused? Has the rebuke of the Almighty never staggered you as with a heavy blow which felled you to the earth? Have you never gone out of the sanctuary to weep, to be ashamed, to clothe yourself in sackcloth and ashes, and to be afraid to look up to heaven? If this has never been your case, either you must be a hardened one, indeed, or else the ministry under which you have been sitting is not a true ministry at all, for God says, “My word is like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces.” If the word, therefore, which you have been accustomed to listen to has never broken you in pieces, it matters not how melodious the voice you may have been

listening to! The external accessories of worship may have been provided with ever so much care, and taste, and lavish expenditure, yes, and the solemn swell of the organ, the gorgeous pomp of architecture, and the comely array of vestments may all have helped to charm you, yet be sure of this, it is *not* the voice of God to you if it has not broken your heart! If you have not been made to feel yourself lost, ruined, and undone by the word of God, I charge you by the living God to be dissatisfied with yourself, or else with the ministry under which you are sitting, for if it were *God's* ministry to your soul, it would break your heart in shivers, and make you cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Not less, also, is a God-sent ministry *clothed with power by God's Spirit to bind up the heart so broken*. Oh, this is a test of many ministries! A sinner who never had a broken heart on account of sin can sit down comfortably in any place of worship, but he who has ever really felt the plague of sin will soon distinguish between the true physician, and him who, though he pretends to have the diploma, knows nothing of the art of heavenly surgery! When God sends peace, and pardon, and mercy to your soul through a ministry, that ministry will be proven at once to your satisfaction to be of God's appointment! It is the instrument through which God's voice has spoken to you! Have you ever found it so when the word has been preached? I know that those ministries which consist only of fine sounding words, stories, stage productions, and all the ornate strains and paltry tricks of actors, can never satisfy the thirst of a living soul! These are not true preachers, but mimics who retail that empty stuff—that scum upon the pot, that froth which will never satisfy a bleeding heart! O beloved, you may sing what songs you will to a sad heart, but no music can charm away its griefs! Only let a ministry be full of Jesus—let Christ be lifted up and set forth, evidently crucified in the midst of the assembly; let His name be poured forth like a sweet perfume, and it shall be as ointment to the wounded heart! And then it will be recognized as the ministry of wheat, and not a ministry of chaff to your souls.

Further, *the ministry which God does not send is of no service in producing holiness*. Dr. Chalmers tells us that when he first began to preach, it was his great end and aim to produce morality, and in order to do so he preached the moral virtues and their excellences. This he did, he says, till most of the people he thought honest turned thieves, and he had scarcely any left that knew much about practical morality. But no sooner did Chalmers begin to understand, as he afterwards did so sweetly, the power of the cross, and to speak about the atoning blood in the name and strength of the eternal Spirit, than the morality, which could not be developed by preaching moral essays, became the immediate result of simply proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus! After all, dear friends, we look to you as our crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus; if the members of our church are unholy, our ministry must lack power; or if, on the other hand, the ministry is, by the grace of God, blessed to the promotion of holiness in the hearers so that they cannot sin cheaply, or transgress in any way without doing violence to an enlightened conscience—and if many are led, step by step, to the attainment of purity and excellence through the power of the truth of God which is delivered, then the ministry is proved to be a ministry of wheat, and not a ministry of chaff. Now, I do not, in saying this, intend an incriminating criticism upon any particular Christian, or any individual Christian minister. I make a close search into my own ministry now, and the ministry of others necessarily comes in view while so doing. I counsel you, my dear friends, when you have a *choice* of the ministry you can attend, do not select a man merely for his learning, nor according to his standing in society, nor according to the excellence of his speech. Remember, all these may be but as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal; they may mean nothing, and less than nothing. But on the other hand, should the preacher be illiterate, if God's Spirit evidently rests upon the man, and he speaks from his heart to your heart, and God has blessed his message to you, it will be better for you to frequent the most humble shed where God is present, than to worship in the most respectable edifice where you will have nothing but the words of *man*, without the living power of the living God!

My soul is growing more and more convinced that the great need of some of us is not to tastefully cull the flowers of rhetoric, and polish our sentences till they glide daintily into your ears, but to let the speech come forth with unchecked freedom—the outpouring of our hearts in simplicity under the power of the Spirit! When we have really put ourselves into God's hands to feel the truths of God that we have to say, we need not be overly nice about picking our words; to come up into our pulpits without thinking both of the subject itself, and the order of stating it would seem to me a species of presumption, but hav-

ing well pondered the matter, we should come with this stern resolve—"I will cast off that glittering metaphor; I will neglect that glowing period. I will not seek any sort of oratorical praise for myself, but I will deliver God's word in such words as shall seem to be nearest to my own heart, and most likely to get at men's hearts and consciences. And with God's help, whether they shall have the ring of the cymbal, or the tune of the tinkling brass about them or not, I shall be able to truthfully say that I have not made your faith stand in the wisdom of man, nor in the power of words, but in the power of the gospel itself, and of the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, which *must* go with that word, or else it will not be a savor of life unto life unto your soul." O dear hearers, what you need—what we *all* need, is to have less and less of that which comes from *ourselves* and savors of the creature, and to have more and more of that which comes from our *God*, who though we cannot see Him, is still in our midst—the mighty to will and to do, for His power is the *only* power, and His life is the *only* life by which we can be saved, and those who hear us!

II. Turning aside, now, from that point with all the lessons it might suggest, let us for a few minutes **APPLY THE TEXT, AS INDIVIDUALS, TO OURSELVES.**

"What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord." Beloved, I trust there are many of us here who are genuine in our profession of religion; who cannot, and who dare not allow the suspicion of hypocrisy to rest upon us. We feel that unless we have been awfully deceived, we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the subjects of a very great change—we know we are, we would be false to our own consciousness if we were to say that we doubted it. Moreover, we are at the present moment in the possession of enjoyments which will not let us think ourselves to be in the gall of bitterness. We know what communion with Christ means; we know the power of prayer; we have had such answers to prayer that for us to hesitate in avowing it would be perfidious mock-modesty, wicked deception, lying before God. We know Christ, and we are found in Him, not having our own righteousness, but wrapped about with His righteousness. No doubt, we are all well aware that if we have wheat in us, there is chaff, too; which is *more*, it may be difficult for us to tell. Some Christians are greatly puzzled when we begin to talk about the experimental riddle which the Christian finds in himself. But if they are perplexed, we cannot help them out of the difficulty except by describing the case. I know in my own soul that I feel myself to be like two distinct men; there is the old man—as base as ever; and the new man who cannot sin, because he is born of God. I cannot, myself, understand the experience of those Christians who do not find a conflict within—for my experience goes to show this, if it shows anything, that there is an incessant contention between the old nature—O that we could be rid of it—and the new nature, for the strength of which God be thanked! Do you not find it so? Though old Ralph Erskine's remark, in his, "Believer's Riddle," may be a little strong, still we can find the marrow of truth in it. He says—

*"Down like a stone, I sink and dive,
Yet daily upward soar and thrive.
To heaven I fly, to earth I tend,
Still better grow, yet never mend.
As all amphibious creatures do,
I live in land, and water, too.
To good and evil equal bent,
I'm both a devil and a saint."*

You know how he means it—not that the Christian is such in his life, but that he finds within himself very strong tendencies to evil, as well as powerful tendencies to good. Though in his general character faith overcomes, for he is so kept that the evil one touches him not, yet while he is preserved among the godly, he cannot help discovering his kindred with the children of disobedience—among whom he sometime walks. I know that saying of Solomon's, "I am black, but comely," would suit me; I have serious doubts, sometimes, about the latter part of it, but never much doubt about the former, "I am black." It strikes me that the more we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's word and in the light of God's Holy Spirit, and compare ourselves with the blessed person, and the perfect character of the Lord Jesus, the more we shall have to hold up our hands and say, "Look not upon me, for I am black because the sun

has looked upon me.” I think we cannot have looked into our hearts, and not find chaff to be there as well as wheat.

This suggests great searching of heart in connection with the question, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” O brothers and sisters, let us feel that the chaff is to be all gotten rid of; let us feel that it is a heavy burden to moan and groan under; that it is not a grievance we should be content with; let us make no provision for the flesh; let us not ask that any chaff may be spared to us. May such a strong and mighty hurricane of divine grace go through our souls, that every particle of chaff shall be taken from us, and only the pure wheat be left in the garner, to the glory of God! I hope that although we feel the tendency to sin, there is not one sin that charms or enslaves us, and that every vain thought shocks us, and that there is not one particle of evil which we would not be happy enough to lose—

*“The dearest idol I have known.
Whatever that idol be;
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only Thee!”*

The principal thought I have on this subject, however, is that there is not only a great deal of our sin which is palpably chaff, but that a great *deal of our religiousness is chaff, likewise!* Do you ever find yourselves borrowing other people’s experience? What is that but chaff? Do you ever find yourselves at a prayer meeting glowing with somebody else’s fervor? What is that but chaff? Does not your faith sometimes depend upon companionship with some fellow Christians? Well, I will not say that your faith is chaff, but I think I may say that such growth in faith as is altogether the result of *second causes*, and not immediately of God is very much like chaff. I wonder how much religion some of us would have if it were all set to cool! There seems to be a great volume of it now while we are living in a warm and genial atmosphere with our friends and comrades in the gospel. Suppose we were exposed to the trial of a bleak night? Suppose we were taken away from the church of which we are members, and made to live in the country where we had no fellow Christians to talk with? I wonder how much of the substance and fervor of our religion we would preserve. It is wonderful how great appearances often diminish and grow small when circumstances change; remember, Christian, just so much and no more than would survive such an ordeal is the total that you now possess! The rest that seems to be, counts for nothing. I am afraid we sometimes think we grow very fast, when in fact our progress is like the growth of the mushroom rather than the growth of an oak. When the Christian sees not his signs, and fears that he does not grow, he often is growing in divine grace; growing downwards, being rooted in humility, getting a deeper sense of his own nothingness and unworthiness, and consequently a higher sense of his Lord’s fullness and loving-kindness. Then he is truly growing! Alas, that he should sometimes think, “Now I am strong; now I am rich, increased in goods, and have need of nothing.” Then it is he deceives himself; he is priding himself in chaff where he needs to have wheat. I would pray the Lord, dearly beloved, that you and I may never cheat our own souls with shams. O that our attainments may stand the test! Let us ask God to take out of us everything that is not real! Depend upon it that is a great prayer to offer, “Lead us not into temptation.” All temptations are treacherous, but self-congratulation is the very essence of guile. “Lord, take from me all the guilt; leave me nothing but the gold. Take from me all the paint, the graining, and the varnish, and leave me nothing but what is truthful and *bolla fide*.” It is a prayer for every Christian to offer. “Search me, O Lord; let me know the worst of my case. Do not let me stand dressed in borrowed plumes, but let me be to my own consciousness, so far as may be, what I really am.” “He who thinks himself to be something when he is nothing,” says the apostle, “deceives himself.” May the Lord grant that we may not perpetrate that folly! We may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive *God*. “What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the Lord.”

Perhaps, brothers and sisters, some of you are passing just now through a severe ordeal; you have been tried, exercised, tempted, and much tossed about, and you think you are losing a great deal. So you are, but what a blessed loss if you are only losing your chaff! When the goldsmith puts the lump of gold into the firing pot, he may perhaps think, “Now, the precious metal is dissolving, and getting smaller, and smaller in quantity.” But, oh, what beautiful losing it is, when the loss is nothing but the withdrawal

of the dross, and the pure gold shines and sparkles with a yet brighter luster because of that loss which it has endured! May your loss and mine be only the loss of our chaff!

III. And now, very briefly, THIS TEXT MAY HAVE A VERY STRONG BEARING UPON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

“What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.” What a vision is that which salutes the eyes of the seer as he now looks upon the visible church of God. It is a great threshing floor; was there ever such a one before? On it are piled heaps and heaps upon heaps! Men rejoice, and are glad, and they say, “This is the threshing floor of Zion, and these are the sheaves from Israel’s garners.” Be it so. Soon the threshing time arrives, and the wheat and the chaff are there; do you see these men congregated and massed together? You may call them by different names, but God regards not that, He looks upon that threshing floor as *one*, and He sees lying together the heaps of chaff and of wheat. Now, imagine that we could have back again among us the days in which Popery was rampant. Suppose that a strong blast of persecution were to come and sweep through our churches, whether established or nonconforming—where would they be? Do you believe that all those multitudes, who now go up to a house of prayer, would go there if by so doing their lives were placed in jeopardy? Take any of our churches. Take *this* church, and do you suppose that all of you who now profess to be Christians would be willing to burn at the stake for your Master? I wish we could believe it, but we cannot. I dare not tell you we believe it, because some of you have been put to much smaller tests than that, and what has become of you? There have been church members who because they have been laughed at—and laughter breaks no bones, have been ashamed of their profession! There have been some who could not bear even a taunt or a jeer, and many a young man has not dared to pray at night, lest those who slept in the same room should ridicule him. “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, how can you contend with the horses?” And if in this land of peace, you have grown weary under a little temptation, what will you do when the floods are out—how will you do in the swelling of Jordan? The nautilus is often seen sailing in tiny fleets in the Mediterranean Sea upon the smooth surface of the water. It is a beautiful sight, but as soon as ever the tempest wind begins to blow and the first ripple appears upon the surface of the sea, the little mariners draw in their sails, and betake themselves to the bottom of the sea, and you see them no more. How many of you are like that? When all goes well with Christianity, many go sailing along fairly in the summer tide, but no sooner does trouble, or affliction, or persecution arise—where are they? Ah, where are they? They have gone! “They went out from us, because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us.”

Yes, in all churches there is no doubt that the wheat and the chaff are mixed together. I think those whose lot it is to look after the church; and, my dear fellow members, you have all an interest in it, ought to guard well the admissions into the church. We must not shut out *one* of the Lord’s lambs, but at the same time we must watch that we do not in any way add to the church without due care and anxious prudence, for “what is the chaff to the wheat?” I do fear that sometimes, during revivals, there have been great additions which have been no enriching of the church. Names have come only to encumber the church books, and persons also have come only to disgrace the holy name by which we are called. O may God grant that if there must be chaff with the wheat, it may not be our fault, that we may not encourage it! The Savior says that while men slept, the enemy came and sowed the tares among the wheat; I suppose the best farmers do sleep, and must sleep sometimes; and, consequently, the enemy comes in, and the tares spring up among us, let us watch as we may; but, at any rate, let us not allow these tares to be sown in open daylight before our very face. Watch and pray, as a Christian church, each one of you as members of it, that we may not be allowed to flatter ourselves with a nominal increase unless it is a real increase from God, for “what is the chaff to the wheat?” Suppose the report should be that there are so many added to the church, but suppose that they are not added to the Lord now, nor found in Christ hereafter? We have done those people serious damage by, by endorsing their pretensions to Christianity when they have no real claim to it. We may have helped their delusion, we may have sewed pillows to their armholes, yes—we may have rocked the cradle of delusive slumber into which they have fallen, and out of which they will never wake until they open their eyes in hell! “What is the chaff to the wheat?” I wish that such a text as this would go whistling through some of the churches! I would like to

hear of its being preached from every pulpit in London, and I would pray the Holy Spirit to make the application of it to the conscience of every hearer. Your admission into the church by infant sprinkling; your admission into the church by confirmation; your admission into the church by the right hand of fellowship, or your admission into the church by believers' immersion—all go for nothing unless you have been admitted into union with Christ! Your sitting at the Lord's Table; your coming often to holy communion; your being found regularly occupying your place in public worship; your joining in the solemn hymn; your bending with others in earnest prayers—these things are all nothing, and less than nothing, and mockery, unless your heart has been renewed! Unless you have the Spirit of Christ, you are none of His. "You must be born-again." O that some such a protest as this would go through professing Christianity! Alas, that so much of it is only ginger-bread, nothing but mere confectionery-religion. Many of our spiritual fortifications are like the Chinese forts that were made of brown paper; O for a single shot from Christ's cannon of gospel truth, and how much of our nominal Christianity would stand?

People say, "How severe! How uncharitable!" No, sirs, everything that falls, falls because it ought to fall; whenever the preacher is stern and severe, and tries the truth of God in the crucible, that which melts *ought* to melt; that which crumbles *ought* to crumble, but God's truth never can be overthrown. It can stand any test! "The grass withers, and the flower thereof fades away, but the word of our God endures forever." True religion has nothing to fear from discussion and criticism; it is only the false and the pretentious that have to fear when God sends the winnowing fan into His church; for, "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord."

IV. And now, lastly, we may use this text, and use it sorrowfully and solemnly, WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE MASS OF HUMAN SOCIETY.

The whole mass of our population may be divided into the wheat and the chaff. Both are mixed up together now, and it would be impossible for you or for me to divide them. They are in courts of law and the houses of commerce, they are in the Exchange and in the committee rooms, they are in busy thoroughfares with their various shops, and in the open streets among those who ply different callings. They are in here in this Tabernacle, and in the many churches and chapels where multitudes assemble; we are all mixed up together—the wheat and the chaff. And it is amazing how united the chaff is with the wheat, for look, the wheat once slept in the bosom of the chaff! The chaff was the outward husk which was necessary to the wheat's production, and yet the very chaff in which the wheat was nursed is to be burned, while the wheat is to be saved! Think of that, mother; think of that, father, if you have godly children, and you yourselves are not saved; your children were nursed upon your knees, and were cherished in your bosom, and yet if that fair girl, if that dear boy shall find Christ, while you shall be left unsaved—the nearness of the relation between the father and the child will not avail you any more than the nearness of relation between the husk and the grain! The wheat and the chaff must be separated—*must be!* In this world the separation does not take place, but when this passing world is done, it will surely occur. The farmer is not always in a hurry to separate his wheat from the chaff, but when the due time comes, it must be done; you do not find him indulging in any hesitant thought, or saying to himself, "I will not tear away that chaff from the wheat after all." No, but without a touch of pity, when the winnowing fork has to be used, the chaff is driven away while the good wheat is secured. You have a godly wife, but you are unconverted, oh, how will you like to be separated from her whom you love? Ah, you have babies in heaven, taken away from some of you before you ever heard their speech in an audible sound—or perhaps taken away as soon as they could lisp their first plaintive syllables, and give the tokens of their loving recognition of your relationship. They have gone up to heaven—and father, will *you* be lost? Mother, will you be divided from them? You must be! You must be unless you find the Savior, through whose precious blood they also have been saved! God makes short work with you, you see. "What is the chaff to the wheat?" as if He had nothing to say to it, but just lets it go. It is the *wheat* He cares for; let the harshness of the expression, which is apparent, rather than real, awaken you, and make you ask yourselves—

*"When You, my righteous Judge, shall come
To fetch Your ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?"*

*Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Your right hand?
I love to meet among them now,
Before Your gracious feet to bow,
Though vilest of them all,
But can I bear the piercing thought—
What if my name should be left out,
When You for them shall call?”*

There is chaff on the best threshing floor; there are ungodly sons and daughters in the best families; unconverted persons are to be found in intimate association with the holiest men and women; two shall be grinding at the mill—one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in one bed, and one shall be taken, and the other left. God will make a division—sharp, decisive, *everlasting*—between the chaff and the wheat. O you thoughtless, frivolous, light, chaffy, giddy spirit—can you bear the thought of being thus separated forever? When the farmer parts the wheat from the chaff, I suppose it is not reasonable to expect that he ever does it perfectly, but let him do it as well as he may, there will be some portion of chaff left in with the wheat. Not so when God holds the fan in His hand! He dispatches the work with inimitable precision; none of the chaff shall escape, nor shall a grain of the wheat be lost! No specious professor shall be spared, nor shall the humble disciple be driven away, God will make all the sheep pass under the hand of Him who tells them, “The Lord knows them who are His.” In that day He will soon detect the impostor, and sever him from the real saints, and this division, when it is made, will be final! The chaff and the wheat will never come together again! Saint and sinner will have no more communion with each other! Ponder well the distinction between their state! There is the wheat; there, in that blessed land we love to sing of, where there are robes of whiteness, and eyes that know not tears—there, there is the wheat! And there is the chaff—there, in that land of which we cannot speak without alarm; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; a land of confusion, where there is no order; a land of death, and ruin, and despair; a land that eats up the inhabitants with pain, and anguish, and lamentation! That is where the chaff must go! Are you prepared to go there? Alienated from God, out of Christ, you will be out of heaven, and out of heaven means to be in hell! There are but two places of destiny; are you ready for this? “No,” you say, “God forbid it!” And so say I—God forbid it! May you and I be found in peace in the day of His appearing, for “What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.” The way of salvation is to trust Christ, trust Jesus! Jesus died for our sins! Jesus took our guilt upon Himself and was punished for all who trust Him. Trust Him! Christ was the sinner’s substitute, and took the sinner’s guilt, and now God can be just in punishing Christ instead of you, and in saying to you, “Go free, through the blood of My dear Son.” God give you divine grace to trust in Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JEREMIAH 23:23.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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